

The Fox Wars: the Mesquakie Challenge to New France

ISSN 0003-4827

Copyright © 1995 State Historical Society of Iowa. This article is posted here for personal use, not for redistribution.

Recommended Citation

"The Fox Wars: the Mesquakie Challenge to New France." *The Annals of Iowa* 54 (1995), 262-263.

Available at: <https://doi.org/10.17077/0003-4827.9932>

Hosted by [Iowa Research Online](#)

The Fox Wars: The Mesquakie Challenge to New France, by R. David Edmunds and Joseph L. Peyser. The Civilization of the American Indian Series, vol. 211. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1993. xix, 282 pp. Illustrations, maps, notes, bibliography, index. \$24.95 cloth.

REVIEWED BY RAYMOND E. HAUSER, WAUBONSEE COMMUNITY COLLEGE

From their location in east-central Wisconsin, the Fox Indians posed an enormous challenge to the French and their Indian allies during the first half of the eighteenth century. In fact, "More than any of the other midwestern tribes, the Foxes remained outside the realm of French hegemony," declare the authors of *The Fox Wars*, "and their ability to maintain their independence in the face of growing French pressure was perceived by French officials as a direct threat to the stability and even the existence of New France" (213). The French responded to this Fox challenge with a policy of genocide.

The authors examine Fox history and culture during the last half of the seventeenth century, their near extermination at the hands of the French during the first half of the eighteenth century, and their subsequent recovery. Never numbering more than 3,500 people, the Foxes identified themselves as Mesquakies ("Red Earth People"), while their neighbors called them Outagamis (Chippewa for "People of the Opposite Shore"), and the French consistently referred to them as Renards ("Foxes").

The Fox Wars began when the Foxes lost a battle with the French and their allies at Detroit in 1712, and then found themselves embroiled in a continuing struggle during which they sustained enormous losses. In 1730 they attempted to flee east to sanctuary among the Iroquois, but the French and their allies destroyed the Foxes "probably . . . on the Grand Prairie of the Illinois, in either modern McLean, or possibly Champaign, county" (246n). By 1733, after a French-sanctioned Huron and Iroquois attack, the desperate condition of the surviving Foxes encouraged them to align themselves with the Sacs. The subsequent recovery of the tribe was tied both to the support offered by the Sacs and to the opportunities available in Iowa.

Iowa has always attracted the Foxes. During the seventeenth century their hunting expeditions traveled there to procure buffalo, and in the eighteenth century the area offered refuge from the French. The Foxes (often with their Sac allies) occupied various village locations in northeastern, central, and northwestern Iowa during the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. For example, the Dubuque region offered Fox women lead mining opportunities during the period between the American Revolution and the Black Hawk War. Even today the "Sacs and Foxes of Iowa" band, enrolling mostly Foxes, lives on

about 3,500 acres near Tama that their ancestors began to purchase in 1856; "because the tribal acreage near Tama was purchased by the Mesquakies with their own funds, the settlement is Indian land but not a 'reservation'" (210).

The scholarly backgrounds of historian R. David Edmunds and linguist Joseph L. Peyser complement one another in this superb ethnohistory, a method that combines ethnology and history. This volume supplements one written by William T. Hagan (*The Sac and Fox Indians* [1958, 1980]), who concentrated mostly on the Sacs and on the nineteenth century. The authors rather convincingly revise current scholarship on several issues concerning the Fox. For example, they place the Foxes in Wisconsin earlier than do other specialists. They also take issue with Richard White's assertion (*The Middle Ground* [1991], 140) that Algonquian Indians were not dependent on European trade goods; Edmunds and Peyser contend that the Foxes were convinced that they needed firearms to defend themselves from the Sioux (their most worrisome traditional enemy), and they also hoped to prevent those enemies from obtaining European weapons. Finally, the authors employ documentary evidence to challenge the archeologically preferred location for the battle of 1730.

Edmunds and Peyser explain that the antagonistic attitude of the Foxes toward the French, which was so different from the cooperative approach adopted by other Central Algonquian peoples, was the consequence of three factors: intertribal enmity, primarily Fox hostilities with the Chippewas and the Sioux; French economic opportunism, capitalizing specifically on a Fox fear that the Sioux would obtain firearms; and French colonial rivalries, especially New France's loss of the Illinois country to Louisiana. They also conclude that the Foxes survived the French effort to exterminate them because they maintained traditional tribal values and because they "possessed a tough resilience, a heartwood of inner strength that enabled them to cling to their sense of identity" (221).

Iowans who augment their personal libraries with even one volume devoted to an area tribe should acquire *The Fox Wars*.

American Agriculture: A Brief History, by R. Douglas Hurt. Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1994. xii, 412 pp. Illustrations, maps, suggested readings, appendix, bibliographical note, index. \$34.95 cloth.

REVIEWED BY DONALD B. MARTI, INDIANA UNIVERSITY, SOUTH BEND

"Ideally," Douglas Hurt remarks in his introduction to *American Agriculture*, "a synthesis of American agricultural history should extend

Copyright of *Annals of Iowa* is the property of State of Iowa, by & through the State Historical Society of Iowa and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.